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ABSTRACT

This document is designed to help out-of-school programs examine their role in providing homework assistance to the students in their care. It explores the renewed emphasis on homework, describes research findings on the purposes and effects of homework, and presents the position of the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST). A list of discussion or survey questions is provided for students, program and school staff, and families to gather information for decision-making. Common concerns about homework that are exhibited by children, their families, and by staff are examined. Also discussed is how programs can support communication between home and school. Advantages and disadvantages to several different approaches to providing homework assistance are described: (1) homework as one activity choice; (2) a contracted activity choice; (3) part of the daily schedule for all students; and (4) including a tutoring, mentoring, or enrichment component. The report closes by providing tips for helping children with learning disabilities, makes suggestions for projects in several areas, and delineates necessary resources for a homework center. An appendix includes program models, a sample agenda for training providers to help with homework, sample homework agreement, and a resource guide. Contains 21 references. A separately-published booklet designed for parents, that summarizes the main points of the main research paper, is appended. (KB)

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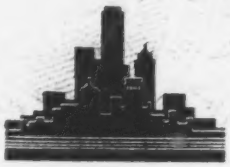

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Homework Assistance & Out-of-School Time:

Filling the Need, Finding a Balance

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Filling the Need, Finding a Balance

Susan O'Connor
Kate McGuire

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April 1998

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Introduction

Recently, homework has become a hot topic among out-of-school time providers. Schools are assigning children more homework and parents want this homework to get done. But whose job is it to make sure that young people complete their homework? When this question was discussed by practitioners in after-school programs five or ten years ago, the most common response was, "Homework is the responsibility of the family. Our program can't possibly take on this task and still meet our goals to provide a safe, caring environment where kids can rest, relax, and choose among a variety of activities."

The needs of children, families, and our communities are changing. Staff in out-of-school programs today are responding to these changes. Many families are asking that programs help with the homework routine to reduce the stress and time pressures that are eroding the quality of family life. Other families, including immigrant families, want to make sure their children have the help they need to successfully complete homework when parents do not have the skills themselves to help. In neighborhoods where large numbers of children are at risk of school failure, programs are being asked by the school district to take an increased role in helping children learn.

This paper is designed to help out-of-school programs think through their role in providing homework assistance. This paper is a guide to help programs make good decisions as they work to find answers to these questions:

- What does the research say about homework?
- How much impact does homework have on school achievement?
- What are kids, families, and staff thinking about homework?
- How can we take these diverse perspectives into account as we make our decision?
- How do various programs approach homework assistance?
- How do we train staff to successfully provide homework assistance?

Why Have our Feelings About Homework Changed Over the Years?

The increased willingness of out-of-school programs to take on homework assistance seems to reflect growing national concerns about children's learning. Child advocates, educators, public officials, parents, and businesses feel we need to step up our efforts to make sure that all children will learn the skills necessary to succeed in school, and to grow into competent adults in an increasingly complex world. Howard Gardner, a leading psychologist and education researcher, feels some of the pressure is due to the perceived economic challenge from Pacific Rim countries, and the decline in

literacy (Gardner, 1993, p.68). There is also heightened concern for children who face additional risks through exposure to poverty, violence, crime, and substance abuse. Education reform, educational standards and numerous public policy initiatives have been implemented to improve our education system. While there is controversy about which strategies will work, there is growing consensus that schools cannot respond to the problem alone. In *Years of Promise: A Comprehensive Learning Strategy for America's Children*, the Carnegie Corporation suggests that we must work to expand the "circle of responsibility" so that a broad collaboration of agencies work together to achieve positive outcomes for children (1996).

These concerns have led parents and educators to place a renewed emphasis on homework. Harris Cooper, an educator who has done extensive research and writing on homework, discusses how American opinion about homework has changed from one era to the next. According to Cooper, homework was first used in the early 1900's to exercise the muscle that was the brain through memorization exercises. In the 1940's, many thought that homework took away from children's time to pursue other activities at home. The balance tipped back toward homework in the 50's with the space race, then met with less favor in the 60's and 70's. Today, homework is in favor again. "In the wake of declining achievement test scores and increasing concern for traditional family values, public perception of the value of homework has undergone its third renaissance in the past 50 years" (Cooper, 1994, p.2).

Part of this renewed focus on homework has to do with the belief among some educators that increased "time on task" will improve student achievement. Cooper indicates that about 20 percent of a student's academic time is gained through homework. Benjamin Bloom, another education researcher, believes that homework is important because it is an "alterable variable." In looking at what affects academic achievement, Bloom reports that "graded homework produces an effect....three times larger than social class...about which we can do little" (Walberg, Paschial, Weinstein, 1996, p.80). However, the research on homework does not paint such a clear picture. Some studies do not show a strong link between time on task and learning (Karweit, 1983, p.73). Another worry among educators is that homework can become yet another area in which children with fewer resources are at a disadvantage. If children cannot get the help that they need, or the quiet time to study, they may fall further behind.

Should school-age programs provide homework assistance to the children in their care? Will it really be a support to children's academic achievement? Or are providers just reacting to temporary shifts in opinion about the importance of homework? What does the research say about homework? And what is at stake for children, families, and programs?

What Does the Research Say About Homework and What are the Implications for Programs?

Families and schools are asking school-age programs to ensure that children complete their homework as a way to support their school success. What does the research say about homework and its effect on helping children achieve and learn? How can programs apply this information to make informed decisions about how to approach the homework issue?

What is the purpose of homework?

Before examining the research about homework, it is important to point out that homework has varying purposes, and will be carried out differently among teachers and school districts. Some of the most commonly cited purposes include:

- To practice and reinforce material presented in class.
- To introduce material that will be presented in class.
- To apply skills to new situations.
- To integrate many different skills (e.g. book reports, science projects, etc.).

(Cooper, 1994, p.4)

Harris Cooper, with a grant from the National Science Foundation, reviewed nearly 120 studies on homework. He has concluded that there are no simple, general findings which prove or disprove the usefulness of homework (Cooper, 1989, p.5). Other researchers agree that homework cannot solidly be linked to achievement (Wahlberg, 1996). This means that while researchers generally feel that homework is of some assistance, the findings are not unanimous, nor are they easy to translate into a policy on homework. Following are some important research findings which programs should consider when developing homework policies.

Homework does seem to support school achievement, with important qualifiers:

Drawing again from Cooper's summary of 120 studies on homework, programs should know that while homework does support school achievement, there are complex issues to consider:

- **Homework is more effective among older children/youth and has a smaller effect on children in grade school.** About 70 percent of comparisons show that students who do homework have higher achievement scores than those who do not do homework, BUT this varies by grade level. The average student who does homework might outscore those who do not do homework:
  - by 52% in grades 4-6
  - by 60% in junior high
  - by 69% in high school (Cooper, 1989, p.12).

Implications for programs

When searching for ways to support children's academic development, this information cautions providers NOT to place all our emphasis on homework. Younger children are less likely to achieve substantial academic improvements by spending more time on homework. Programs that are concerned about younger children who are at academic risk may want to work directly with families and schools to find additional ways to support improved achievement.

- **Shorter, but more frequent assignments are more effective** (Cooper, 1989, p.13-14), **and the recommended amount of homework per day changes as children get older** (Cooper, 1989, p.40).

  Grades 1-3: 10-45 minutes
  Grades 4-6: 45-90 minutes
  Grades 7-9: 60-120 minutes

Implications for programs

Because children are assigned more homework as they get older, it makes sense for a program to be flexible about how much time a child will spend on homework. For example, a first grader may only need 10 minutes to work on homework, and then can move on to other activities, but a seventh grader may need 90 minutes. In addition, if one child routinely spends more time on homework than other children from the same class, staff may want to check on this. Does the child work at a slower, and more methodical pace than other children, or is the child struggling to complete homework that exceeds her/his current skills?

- **Homework falls in the middle of other strategies used to improve achievement.** In 1986, Wahlberg compared homework with eleven other strategies for improving achievement. He found that homework's effect fell in the middle of the eleven strategies. The other strategies included use of praise, use of pretests, television watching, ability grouping, direct and programmed instruction, individualized, special, and cooperative learning, advance organizers, and higher level cognitive questioning (Cooper, 1989, p.18).

Implications for programs
If program staff and families agree that a primary goal is to improve children's academic achievement, homework assistance may only be one strategy they will use to accomplish their goal. They may want to consider tutoring, cooperative learning activities, recreational reading, and/or experiential science activities.

- **Research suggests that the positive effects of homework are** (Cooper, 1989):

1. Immediate achievement and learning: better retention, critical thinking, increased understanding
2. Long-term academic gains: better study habits, learning encouraged, improved school attitude
3. Nonacademic gains: greater self-direction and discipline, time organization, independent problem-solving

Implications for programs
Many educators believe that it is important for children in younger grades to have homework assignments. They believe that small amounts of homework will help children develop the strong study habits and discipline necessary for success in the upper grades, when homework is more directly linked to achievement. Ensuring that a child establishes good study habits is a very important part of the homework experience.

- **The suggested negative effects of homework are** (Cooper, 1989):

1. Satiation: loss of interest in academics, fatigue
2. Denial of access to leisure time and community activities
3. Increased differences between high and low achievers

Implications for programs
Program staff and family members frequently check in to make sure that children have a balance of activities in their lives. They want to make sure that they also have time to rest and relax, play, exercise, make friends, and try out skills and projects that aren't normally done in school. A child that spends most of the evening working on homework or in other learning activities may not arrive at school refreshed for the next day.

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time's Position

The research on homework does not lay out an obvious set of policies for programs to follow, but there are two important things to keep in mind. First, the reality is that children and youth arrive at programs with homework to do. Second, if the program does not provide the time, space and resources for children to do their homework, the full burden falls on families when they get home at night. Many

children and families want the homework to get done during program time, so they have time to relax, do other activities, or take care of family responsibilities when they get home.

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) recommends that each program develop its own homework policy. While individual program policies may differ, here are some crucial guidelines to keep in mind.

- The most effective homework policy will be developed when the opinions and needs of children, families, and staff are taken into consideration. Discussions should focus on balancing the research findings, the resources available to the program, and the needs of those served.
- Homework assistance and enrichment activities are especially important for children who are at risk of school failure. Some families cannot provide children with the quiet space, resources and assistance that they need to successfully complete homework. Without help from the program, homework may become yet another place where students with fewer resources fall behind.
- Homework is only one way to support academic achievement. Programs can also offer tutoring, enrichment activities and recreational reading programs to help students develop skills and build self-confidence.
- Children's academic needs must be balanced with their physical, emotional and social needs. Children need time to blow off steam and have snacks, play with friends, build relationships with caring adults, and develop their own talents and hobbies.

How Should Programs Decide About Homework Assistance?

There are a variety of ways to gather information from all of the involved groups so that an informed decision can be made. Questions could be asked in a survey that families, children, and staff fill out at the end of a program day. Whenever possible, include school personnel in discussions. A community-wide meeting with a pot-luck dinner and discussion groups could work well. (Possible discussion or survey questions are listed below). The feedback from the smaller groups could be shared with the whole group to come to a general agreement on the spot, or could be given to the Board of Director's to develop a policy. Regardless of the approach, be careful to get opinions from as many people as possible. Homework is one issue that can be controversial and divisive between staff and families. It is possible to adopt a policy that allows for individual choice, so getting a sense of the opinions of as many people as possible is valuable. Be sure to share the results of the discussion and the decision-making process with everyone.

Discussion or Survey Questions to Guide a Decision on Homework

Questions to Ask Children

1. When do you do your homework now?
2. Do you have the time you need to do it?
3. Do you have the supplies and the help you need to do it?
4. Would you like to do homework at the program? What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing homework at the program?
5. What's easy about doing your homework? What do you need help with?

Questions to Ask Program Staff

1. What are the advantages and disadvantages of providing homework assistance?
2. Would it benefit children to do homework at the program?
3. Would it benefit families?
4. How would this affect your job?
5. Would you feel comfortable helping children with their homework?
6. What kinds of training do you think would help you provide quality homework assistance to children?

Questions to Ask Families

1. When do the children do their homework now?
2. How does that affect your family?
3. Would you like them to do it at the program? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this for your child? For you as a family?
4. What kind of help would your child/youth need?
5. What can be done to create good communication between program staff, families, and schools about homework?

Questions to Ask School Staff

1. Do you feel that after-school staff should provide homework assistance?
2. What resources could you provide to support homework assistance (e.g. communication about individual students, learning goals, etc.)?
3. What are the district's learning goals in language arts, math, etc?
4. What are the school's learning themes that can be reinforced through activities in the after-school program?

Full Group Discussion to Set the Program's Policy

1. Should this program offer homework assistance? What are the advantages and disadvantages for children/youth, families, and staff?

2. Should every child be required to work on homework? Or should the schedule be arranged so that children can choose *when* and *if* they would like to work on homework?

3. How much time should be set aside for homework? Should children have to complete homework?

4. Where can we locate a homework corner?

5. Will we just offer the time and place to do homework, or will we offer homework assistance? Who will offer it (program staff, teachers from school, volunteers, tutors, etc.)?

6. What training and supervision will they need?

7. What resources are needed?

8. How can good communication be maintained between families, schools, and providers if homework is to be done at the program?

The decisions about whether or not to provide homework assistance, and what kinds of assistance can be provided, will affect everyone in the program. The following sections outline various reactions that children, families and staff often share when discussing homework.

How do kids see homework?

When young people are asked if they want to work on homework at their after school programs, they often have mixed feelings. Their immediate response may be that they do not want to give up time to relax, talk with their friends, play outdoors, or explore new hobbies. At the same time, they often know that it can be hard to wait until they are home. Once they are home, they may not have the time, energy, or help they need. Completing homework, and having assistance at the program, may make a huge difference in children's feelings about their school success.

Amy Scharf and Carol Stack did an in-depth ethnographic study looking at the meaning of homework for forty fourth-sixth graders in the San Francisco Bay Area. The researchers found that school staff often view homework as an issue about school, learning, and the development of good work habits. But this study shows us how differently children and youth view homework. For children, homework touches on the arenas of home and family, friends, community, self-perception, race, ethnicity and culture, gender, and orientation to personal and social futures (Scharf and Stack, 1995, p.27). In interviews with children, they found that three main concerns emerged. They find that children worry about having the skills to complete homework, the time to do it, or if their negative attitudes about school will get in the way.

Concern #1: "Will I be able to do it?" Concerns about Homework

Homework often raises anxiety in young people. Will they be able to do it? If not, will there be someone available to help them? Twelve year old Michelle brings this concern alive:

> *"What if you went home and had something that you had to do in your homework and you had just learned about it but you had forgot and your mom didn't know about it because the way they did it back then was different, and you didn't have the phone number and your teacher wasn't at school and you didn't have anybody to call... what would you do?"*
> (Scharf and Stack, 1995, p.27).

Students sometimes find that when they start their homework, they do not understand the instructions or do not remember how to tackle a math problem or social studies issue. Some students are lucky to have lots of help at home from parents or older siblings. Other students can draw on a wide circle of friends. But students who routinely lack the basic skills to successfully complete their homework face frequent anxiety and frustration.

Unfortunately, the students who need the most help often have the fewest resources. They may have neither the time to complete homework, nor the help from family members or classmates when they have problems. This could lead to yet another way that children with fewer resources get tracked into lower level classes based on circumstance, not on ability.

If Michelle attended an after school program that offered homework assistance, she could get the help she needed. A staff person might be able to help her, or another student might help. Sometimes, older children who have recently had a particular teacher or class can help. If the program is in close communication with the school, they might even be able to reach Michelle's teacher for advice.

Concern #2: "What if I don't have the time?" Negotiating homework and other responsibilities

Some children get a clear message from their families that their first job is to finish school tasks. But many other children have competing priorities when they are home. Some are responsible for caring for siblings or cousins, preparing meals, keeping the house clean or even helping out with family conflicts. Of the fourth graders that Scharf and Stack interviewed, a few of them found that basic family survival issues took precedence. Other kids were more worried about parents being angry with them if they did not do household tasks first, than they were about incomplete homework. In addition, some kids had lots of community activities in which they were involved.

Concern #3: "What if I hate school?" Feelings about school

For some young people, homework comes to represent schooling itself. If schooling is valued as something relevant and important for building a better future, then homework has more value. But if school is not valued or if children feel silenced or that they aren't successful at school, homework is often seen as difficult or distracting (Scharf and Stack, 1995, p.52). Two girls interviewed by Scharf and Stack said they didn't spend much time on their homework. They complained that they were assigned too much homework, that it was too hard, and that it wasn't explained well. They complained bitterly about their teacher, saying she was racist and unfair. When Scharf and Stack interviewed the same girls again the next year, they said that homework was important and both did more of it. They liked their new teachers and felt that they "want to help you learn" (Scharf and Stack, 1995, p.55). For those girls,

their attitude about homework was a reflection of their positive relationship with their teacher and her message to the girls that they can succeed.

Four boys resisted doing homework. Generally, they felt picked on in school. The group of boys refused to do much related to school. It became a point of resistance for the whole group. They also complained that school did not include any culturally relevant information for them... "It ain't nobody in our class is Greek, nobody. And that's all we do...." When the same boy was asked what he wanted to learn about he said, "About my culture, my background."

In this study, the same homework was given to every child in the classroom, even though the teacher realized they each had different strengths and academic preparation, different attitudes, and different circumstances outside the school (Scharf and Stack, 1995, p.5). Children who have fewer skills will need more help in completing homework that has been assigned. For these children, homework assistance may be the only way to prevent homework from becoming one more way to sort out the kids who are successful from those who are not making it.

How do family members feel?

When family members are asked whether they want the program to take on homework assistance, the answer is often a resounding yes. Three common reasons emerge: the family faces so many other stresses, families want children to succeed in school, and some families feel ill equipped to help children with homework.

Family stresses

Families are feeling squeezed. Adults are trying to juggle long work days, their responsibilities in raising children and running a household. Some family members are working two and three jobs to make ends meet. Managing all of this is difficult enough for a two parent family, but an increasing number of children are being raised by a single parent, or grandparents or other guardians. Many families simply run out of the time or energy necessary for homework. Once dinner is finished, time is already short, but may be consumed by a community activity (soccer, church, a meeting at school). For families with lots of children, especially those with only one adult, it is hard to give each child the help and attention they may need, and still do the dishes, the laundry, and prepare for the next day. And for families facing major crises (family illness, poverty, substance abuse), homework may become a low priority.

Families want children to succeed in school, and in life

Families want to be sure their children succeed in school and are prepared for life. Recent research with both low-income Mexican-American and European-American families shows that families have high aspirations for their children's education and future careers. However, some families may not be able provide the academic assistance that their children need. Whether it's because of language difficulties, low parental education levels, or lack of available resources, some families

must depend on schools or other community organizations to make sure their children achieve a high level of success (Villarruel and Lerner, 1994, p.67).

Other families are concerned because they are not confident that schools are adequately preparing children for life success. Families may push for out-of-school programs to help compensate for skill development that children are not getting in school. They may ask programs to work on homework assistance as well as broader skill development. Research shows that children who spend 20-35 hours per week engaged in constructive learning activities are significantly more likely to succeed in school (Clark, 1990).

Families may not have the skills to support homework assistance

Families that are limited English proficient, or have not completed many years of school may simply not have the skill to support homework assistance. In these families, older siblings may be expected to help younger siblings with homework issues. Even in families whose primary language is English, approaches to certain subjects may have changed. Families may not know how to help a child do math problems in the same way that the child learned in school. Or family members may not understand the point of certain exercises, such as invented spelling. These issues can create tension at home.

As the program community makes a decision about homework, it is important to take into account the ability of families to shoulder the full responsibility for homework.

How do staff feel?

While some staff feel that providing homework assistance is an important part of their work, other staff, when asked to take on homework assistance, feel that they cannot take on another thing. Even staff who can figure out how to fit this task into the day wonder if they will have the skills needed, and wonder if homework should take priority over the goal of helping to support children's social and emotional development.

Time and resources are barriers.

Most program staff already feel over-burdened. While some staff may be full-time and have years of experience, many staff are young and inexperienced. Program staff often work only part-time. Many staff have a second or third job, or are students in high school or college. They may arrive when the children arrive, and leave when the children leave. Other staff come only two to three days a week, and may not be able to provide continuity with homework assistance. Staff teams often have little or no time for program planning, staff meetings, training and supervision, all of which would be important for running a quality homework assistance program.

There is also an issue of ratios. Many practitioners find that it is impossible to

provide quality homework assistance when ratios exceed 1:8 or 1:10. Most states allow staff-child ratios to exceed 1:15. If a staff person is working with a few children on tough homework problems, how do the rest of the staff provide quality programming for other children? Programs providing homework assistance would ideally have staff-child ratios at 1:10 or lower. Some programs meet this challenge by bringing in volunteers to provide homework assistance. Other programs use work-study students from local colleges. These strategies may also be useful when staff simply do not have the educational background, or necessary skills to successfully help with homework.

Will homework assistance compromise other program goals?

Staff may be willing to support school and family requests to work on homework if they can be sure they can manage this and still not compromise the other goals they want to accomplish during the program.

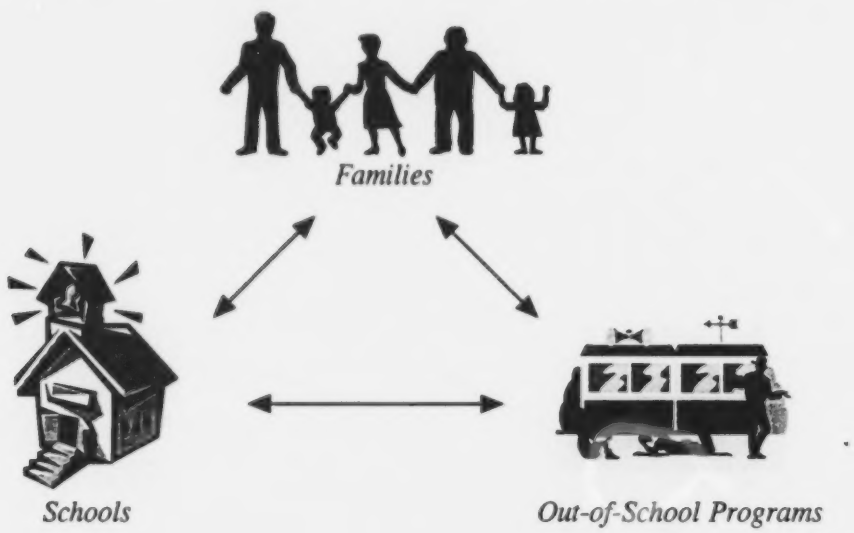
Staff in out-of-school programs often feel strongly that extending the school day, and increasing the amount of time children spend on school tasks, is not in the best interest of many children. They want to safeguard the time for children to relax and for active play where they can "blow off steam." They want to provide opportunities for children to learn in ways different than in school. Staff are often particularly protective of the time it takes for children to develop social skills. They know that social competence has a great deal to do with school success and in fact with success in life (Hartup, 1992; Goleman, 1995). They want to make sure children have time to interact with each other and with adults so that they learn how to communicate, share their feelings, and work out problems. Staff also want to make sure that children who are not feeling successful in school have a chance to learn in new ways which are more in tune with their learning styles. Out-of-school programs are perfect places for children who learn by doing, and thrive when presented with experiences in the arts, in the community, and in cultural exploration.

Staff with these concerns are finding ways to work with families and with schools to strike a balance between homework and other program goals through careful program design.

How Can Programs Support Communication Between Home and School?

One of the main purposes of homework is to provide a link between home and school. Families who are involved in the homework process learn what the child is working on in school, have a sense of how the child is progressing with new skills, and can better support and advocate for the child in the school setting. While it is true that families are asking providers to help children with their homework during program time, it is important that programs and families develop a partnership for supporting the child and for communicating with the school. Programs should be careful not to take over the family's involvement in homework or their role in communicating directly with school.

But what should the program do if the family feels unable to manage the direct connection with the school? Many working families find it hard to have frequent communication with the school. There are often time constraints both for families and for school staff, and some parents simply do not have the luxury of being available by phone during the few minutes a teacher may have available during the school day. Other times, a family may be consumed with survival issues. In addition, some adults do not have the confidence to approach school staff with issues and problems. Their own experience in school may have been negative, or they may have very little schooling themselves. A language barrier can also create frustrating problems.



Whenever possible, it is important to help support direct contact between the family and the school. Some program staff have found that families just need encouragement and help in deciding how to approach the school about difficult issues. Sometimes it is enough for the family to be able to combine their own experiences with that of program staff to strengthen their confidence in approaching the school. But there will be times when communication is stalled. Some programs offer to accompany a family member to a school conference to help them get over the first hurdles in communication (see The Bell Foundation under program models). Other programs have helped connect families and schools with translators to ease language problems. Frequently, program directors participate in consultations for children with special learning needs. In any case, the primary goal is to empower families to work closely with the schools for their children.

Certainly, there will be times when it is beneficial for the program staff to have direct communication with the school. In these cases, it is always important to maintain rules of confidentiality and ask families for written permission for the release of information before speaking to school personnel about any child.

Beyond communication about individual children, there are many ways that programs enhance their communication with the school, in order to be responsive to children's academic needs and general development. Some programs invite school personnel to share the school's curriculum and philosophy about homework. Many programs enjoy working side-by-side with school personnel for homework assistance and tutoring. Extra support and guidance from teachers, guidance counselors, and special education instructors can be important for children having problems with homework and for children with special needs. Staff at the Community Day School programs in Seattle establish routine communication with each child's teacher to discuss common goals. Staff have found this has been instrumental in an improved relationship with all school staff. This type of communication and cooperation creates a common language between programs and schools, making the partnership real.

The following steps are recommended for families to maintain good communication with the school. These tips can be shared with families, but also are important to keep in mind when programs have their own communication with the school (adapted from Paulu, 1995).

1. Establish communication early.
    - It is essential to establish communication with the school early, to understand the teacher's approach to homework, to agree on goals for homework, and to share information about the child's learning style.

2. Give feedback to the teacher or to school personnel when:
    - assignments are too hard
    - assignments are repetitive, or too easy for a child able to move faster
    - instructions are unclear
    - child is overwhelmed with too much homework
    - child has missed school and needs a sensible schedule for making up the work

3. Work together to solve problems.
    - Work together to find a solution that everyone is comfortable with. Then summarize what you've agreed to and communicate it to others who also may need to know.

4. Follow-up to make sure the approach is working.

What Type of Homework Assistance Approach Will Work in Your Program?

There are a broad range of ways to approach homework assistance which seem to fall into a few general categories:

Homework as one activity choice

Many programs simply create a space where homework can be done and let the children choose each day whether or not to work on homework. Children may choose to go the homework room or homework corner at any time during program hours, or the program may select one or two blocks of time when homework is an option.

Advantages

This allows children to be self-regulating about how much homework they do each day. After a structured day, children may choose to complete some homework or all of it one day, and none the next. This provides children the chance to make thoughtful decisions about what is most important--to relax, blow off steam, develop new hobbies and interests, spend time developing relationships with peers and adults, or do homework.

Disadvantages

Homework may not be completed. This is especially true for children who rarely choose to do homework because it is a difficult task for them or because they are distracted by friends and all the other activity choices. In the long run, it may not be in their best interest to put off doing it. For children who have a lot to do when they get home, the homework may not be completed. For children who can not access assistance with a troublesome homework assignment at home, getting the assistance at the program is essential. Uncompleted homework can become a source of tension between family members and children, and can contribute to a child's sense of falling behind at school.

Homework as a contracted activity choice

More and more programs are asking parents or guardians to sign homework contracts (see Appendix for sample). The contract requires that children and families come to an agreement about whether a child will do homework at the program, and if so, how much homework the child will complete. Once the contract is signed, staff are expected to support the agreement between the child and the family. NIOST recommends this approach, for it gives everyone involved a say about how the complex issues around homework will be tackled. Children and families are encouraged to make a decision together. Program staff can spell out how much more support they are able to provide.

Advantages

The contract method encourages families to work out a decision together. The contract can spell out the responsibilities of each party. The agreement within families takes staff out of the role of policing homework, which they dread. The contract also reminds families that they should check the child's homework, and that they should be in touch with the school when their child is having problems. The sample contract also allows programs to collect information from family members about how to most successfully help individual children with their homework.

Disadvantages

Some programs are so short-staffed that adding a layer of paperwork seems unmanageable. Programs may also worry that a parent or guardian may pressure the child into signing a contract that the child does not really agree with. If this happens, the child may refuse to cooperate with the agreement once the parent/guardian is not present. This could lead to difficulties between the child, the family, and the program which could be resolved in a three-way meeting.

Homework as part of the daily schedule for every child

Some programs reported that they have a time when all the children must work on homework. This is most often the case in neighborhoods and communities with more concern about school failure. If a child does not have homework, the program asks that they read or do another quiet activity.

Advantages

Children who are easily distracted by other activity choices may be more willing to focus on their homework if everyone is working on it at the same time. Also, for programs with limited space, having a program-wide homework time can insure that all children will be quiet while they concentrate on completing the task.

Disadvantages

This approach does not give children a choice. While some children like to do it first and get it out of the way, other children need to have snack or time for active play or socializing before they can concentrate. Children who do not have any assignments are still expected to sit quietly or are given mimeographed worksheets. Very young children are often given inappropriate worksheets to keep them busy and give them the feeling of having homework.

Homework assistance that includes a tutoring, mentoring or enrichment component

Some programs have found that it is not enough to offer homework assistance. For various reasons, families may want programs to provide additional enrichment. Families may feel that the schools are not teaching their children enough to insure future academic or career success. These families would like their children to be challenged with skill development in addition to that provided during the school day. In other cases, it becomes clear that a number of children are not able to do the homework that is assigned and are having problems keeping up in school. In these cases, families want their children to get extra assistance in order to increase their chances of succeeding in school. There are an increasing number of programs that are working on building academic skills through tutoring/mentoring programs. Programs are using community volunteers, including college students and Americorps Members.

A review of the research on 1,700 tutoring/mentoring programs that used college students found positive effects on the test scores, grades, and overall academic performance of disadvantaged children. The studies also documented increased

motivation, self-esteem and self-confidence for children involved in the programs. These positive effects are more strongly related to programs that have a high degree of structure and work with the tutors and mentors to have:

- A defined time commitment
- Go through systematic screening to select those who place a high value on service and have specific skills.
- Are trained and monitored

Tutors and mentors often help with homework assistance and may also offer enrichment learning through a variety of activities in literacy, science, math, technology and the arts. These activities are often approached in a way that may be different than in school. This can be a wonderful support to children as long as staff make sure that children get their needs met to eat, socialize, and relax so they are ready for the next school day.

Advantages

Tutoring supports the children who find homework frustrating and a repeated reminder that they are not as capable as others at their grade level. The support can be offered in small groups or with individuals where the relationship and individual attention can create new success. If staff and volunteers work hard to develop activities that come out of children's interests and are sensitive to each child's learning styles, there may be great success.

Disadvantages

The tutoring or learning activities may restrict a child's opportunities to build social competence, blow off steam, get exercise, and in other ways build skills and be ready to sit through the next school day. This disadvantage can be addressed through a redesigning the program.

Tips for Helping Children with Learning Disabilities

One of the difficulties with providing homework help is that all children have different needs and different learning styles. Children with learning disabilities, and children at high risk of school failure, may require additional homework assistance. Bad experiences with homework can develop frustrations and negative attitudes towards schooling. Children with learning disabilities may have a harder time with homework because of "the likelihood that students with disabilities will have less developed self-management and study skills" (Cooper, 1994b, 478).

The research suggests that homework for children with learning disabilities should:

1. focus on short assignments
2. practice skills already learned in class
3. be started in class to make sure that students understand the assignment and the material

To help students with learning disabilities, program staff can:

1. be aware that children with learning disabilities may need additional structure
2. be aware of the type of environment that is helpful
3. check on progress regularly
4. review completed work
5. provide immediate rewards for success
6. be in close contact with the school and the families
7. provide a tutor for one-on-one help for those who need it.

For children with learning disabilities, it is especially important that program staff communicate frequently with parents and school staff. If a child is constantly struggling with homework, it may indicate a problem. The child may be behind in school. The homework may be inappropriate. The child may need extra assistance in a subject. The difficulties may indicate a learning disability. No matter what the reason is, it is important for school-age care providers to talk with parents and school staff about the difficulties that the child is having.

Maintaining a Balance

Even if the primary focus of your program is academic, it is important to remember children's overall developmental needs. Children need to play, to have snacks, to explore their surrounding environments, to develop meaningful relationships with peers and adults, and to build a strong sense of self. There are many valuable skills which are not the focus of academic training. Out-of-school programs, families and children should discuss ways to develop a balance between the pressures of school and the other developmental needs of children.

Howard Gardner, a prominent psychologist and educational researcher, studies intelligence. He claims that schools currently focus their teaching styles and testing practices on two areas of intelligence: linguistic skills and logical-mathematical skills. Gardner believes that there are actually seven different intelligences, not just the two traditionally developed in schools. The seven intelligences which he defines are:

1. Linguistic
2. Logical-mathematical
3. Spatial: ability to move and operate based on mental models of spatial world
4. Musical
5. Bodily-kinesthetic: using the body or parts of the body, e.g. dancing
6. Interpersonal: ability to understand others
7. Intrapersonal: ability to form accurate perceptions of oneself

What does this mean for out-of-school programs? This means that there are several aspects of a child's intelligence which are not regularly developed during the typical school day. Gardner believes that education should develop all of these intelligences, and he outlines a curriculum approach which is similar to that presented by Lillian Katz and Sylvia Chard in their book, *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach* (1989). According to Katz and Chard, children ages 5-8 should spend part of their time engaged in typical academic tasks (skills acquisition) and the rest of their time engaged in project work (skills application). This approach seems very similar to what Howard Gardner is suggesting for all school-age children.

What is a project? A project is "an in-depth study of a particular topic" (Katz & Chard, 1989, p.2). Children work on the same project for a period of days or even weeks, depending on their age and on the size of the project. Whereas younger children often spend much of their time spontaneously playing, a project involves advanced planning and a sustained effort. The goal of project work is to encourage "children to apply their emerging skills in informal, open-ended activities that are intended to improve their understanding of the world they live in" (Katz & Chard, 1989, p.xii). Projects can be aligned with the school's curriculum themes and learning goals through joint planning with school staff. Pages 22-23 contain examples of projects which support both academic skills and the development of other intelligences.

Projects That Support Linguistic, Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Skills

- Involve older children in community service by having them become reading buddies with younger children. Once a week, they select books to read aloud to their buddy, record story tapes for their buddy, or listen to their younger buddy read aloud. While the older children are learning to improve their own reading skills, they are also learning how to be helpful for a younger person in their community.
- Work in a group to produce a play. Younger children can work with puppets, older children can produce a full-scale play. The topic of the play could be something of relevance to their lives. For example, they could interview their parents or grandparents about their ethnic origins; or they could write about something which they deeply care about.
- Develop a "sister" after-school program in which the population is very different. If this program is within traveling distance, the children could visit each other, going on joint field trips, sharing cultural traditions, and having a party. Even if the program is at a distance, they could exchange letters, send audio or visual tapes, or use the internet to create pen pal systems. They can exchange biographies of themselves to talk about what's important to each of them.

Projects That Support Science Skills

- Teach children the scientific approach to observation. Take them to a pond; set up an aquarium.
- Work with a local shop teacher to set up a unit on electronics. Parents can donate old clocks, radios and tape players that don't work. Kids can take them apart to see how they work.
- During winter, track the phases of the moon. Children can draw each new phase, learn the names, and make paper mache models of them. Then, using glow-in-the dark stickers, they can map moon phases and constellations on the wall or ceiling.
- Write healthy snack menus based on the food pyramid. Publish the menus for children who are not in out-of-school programs.

Projects That Support Logical-Mathematical and Spatial Skills

For Younger Children:

- Set up a dramatic play area which models a grocery store. Price all of the goods. Use play money to pay for groceries. Encourage children to use calculators to add the prices of the goods. Or add new props to the block corner, so children can frequently make models of buildings and neighborhoods.
- Many board games, such as Monopoly and Yahtzee, require adding and subtracting.

For Older Children:

- Have children learn to do budgeting and buying. The children could build on the snack menus they have created, then go to the store to purchase their snacks. In subsequent weeks, they can learn how to stay within a snack budget.
- Have the children redesign their classroom space. Have them learn about simple architectural drawings. Use graph paper to decide where the furniture and different areas will be relocated. Then have them carry out their plans. Invite the parents to join the class on the day you will be moving the furniture.

Projects that Support Musical and Bodily-Kinesthetic Skills

- Have a specialist teach modern dance. After the children have learned basic skills, have them choreograph their own dances either to classical music or to the kids' favorite songs. If you have access to a drum set or to African drums and instruction, some kids may prefer drumming to the dance.
- Have children select some of their favorite music, then rewrite the words according to what's happened in their lives or what is important to them.

Necessary Resources for a Homework Center

The most important resource for homework success is a comfortable setting. Some children have trouble doing homework when there is noise of any kind. Other children may be comfortable with quiet conversations, and may even want to work in small groups on their homework or on group projects. If it is possible, have two separate spaces--one that is a quiet room with desks and chairs, and another space where quiet conversations and group projects can take place. Similarly, some young people need to work at a table with a straight back chair, while others prefer more comfortable furniture like couches, bean bag chairs, or even lying on a carpeted area.

If the program is sharing space in a school, ask for additional quiet space such as use of the library. Even if the library is not available the whole afternoon, find out if the children can use the reference materials for 30 minutes each day. More and more schools are also making computer labs available for school-age child care programs. This is especially helpful for children who struggle with handwriting. Working on the computer or word processor can make it easier to complete a book report or essay. Becoming computer literate is also a very important life skill. Even if these special spaces are not available, a teacher who supports the idea of homework assistance may be willing to make a classroom available.

Programs that are housed within an agency or community building may need to create a space that will work for homework. A room that is often used for board games and art could be designated as a homework space for a certain period of time. Some programs share space that is used by other agency programs at other times of the day. Other programs have found small spaces that were used for storage. Family members that want homework time at the program may be willing to help empty out and paint an unused storage space. Make sure the area is well-lighted. Lamps may work well to provide direct, but softer lighting.

Materials and supplies for the homework center

Pencils, pens, and erasers, Crayons, markers, colored pencils, and correction fluid
Paper, including graphing paper and construction paper
Three-hole punch , scissors
Dictionary, Thesaurus, Encyclopedias, Atlas, globe
Access to a library, daily newspaper and weekly community newspapers
A variety of magazines (news, hobbies, ethnic, etc.)
Computers, word processors, or typewriters
Calculator, protractor, compass, cuisenaire rods
Chalkboard or flip chart to draw out ideas (McClain, p.36)

Sources for funding or resources:

Programs may want to seek funds or in-kind donations for the purchase of materials and supplies, or to pay for the training or salaries of those providing homework assistance or tutoring. Use the information in this paper to build the case for approaches to:

PTA
United Way
Local civic or religious organizations
Businesses and corporations
Private and community foundations

Appendix

Program Models

Training Staff/Volunteers to Provide Homework Assistance

Sample Homework Agreement

Resource Guide

Program Models

Lakeland Children's Center
P.O. Box 712
Shrub Oak, NY 10588
(914) 528-8119
Contact: Carole Weisberg
e-mail: carolew@prodigy.net

The Lakeland Children's Center is committed to the support of working families. One way in which they support families is by setting aside time and space for children to complete all or part of their homework at the Center. Like many after-school programs, the regular program staff offer assistance for 30-45 minutes Monday - Thursday. While they feel homework is an important element of the Center program, it is not the main focus and there may be days when Center activities will interfere with homework time. They will not take over parental responsibilities and get into the "battle of homework" with children who choose not to get their homework done at the Center. They want children to enjoy the Center program and will not impose any consequences if homework is not completed. The Center feels this is a matter that belongs between parent and child and should be addressed at home.

The DePaul Center for Urban Education
2320 North Kenmore, Rm. SAC 302
Chicago, IL 60614
(773) 325-7170
Contact: Carla Ellis, Associate Director

The Chicago Board of Education is funding Learning Centers at 83 Chicago Parks District Programs which are serving about 7,000 children. Each site is run by a teacher from the Chicago schools. The Center for Urban Education at DePaul University recruits, trains and provides monthly meetings for the teachers. The Future Teachers of America recruits college students to work at the centers so that the staff:child ratios are 1:8. The program started as a center for enrichment learning activities, but at many sites, families have requested that children also work on their homework. There is a 50/50 rule that if a child spends 1/2 hour on homework, s/he should spend the other half hour doing one of the topic-based activities in the math, reading or science areas. This provides a balance in activities for children who may often bring repetitive or uninteresting homework. One month's learning topic focused on Chicago's seasons, plants, and animals. In addition, children can choose sports and recreation activities that are offered by the parks and recreation staff. The program wants parents to be involved and asks that they come to the learning center one time per month this year.

Homework Centers on U.S. Army Posts
State 4-H Youth Development Specialist
University Extension
University of Missouri-Columbia
206 Whitten Hall
Columbia, MO 65211
(573) 884-1917
Contact: Barbara Brown
brownb@ext.missouri.edu

The U.S. Army is increasing the out-of-school activity options, particularly during parental work hours, for children and youth ages 6-18. Posts are setting up homework centers as part of mentoring, intervention, and support services. The centers provide a setting for completion of homework, complete with teachers, tutors and a variety of resources. Some posts have several homework centers, often to meet the needs of different age groups. The centers are generally open after school, early evenings and some weekend hours. One of the guiding principles of the centers is that homework should be an activity of choice rather than a required activity for the participants. Posts have been encouraged to use a team planning process to set up the centers. The team could include key Army school-age and youth staff, a parent, teen and older school-age child, and representatives from the school/s that will be served. Whenever possible, the centers are run by credentialed teachers to work in at least a 1:15 teacher/participant ratio. Cooperative Extension has created a manual that spells out how to get started and sound operating procedures.

The BELL Foundation
1000 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 868-1000 ext.220
Contact: Earl Martin Phalen

Over 200 volunteers, mostly college students, are recruited and trained to provide tutoring for over 300 low-income children. Potential tutors attend a presentation and fill out an application, and are interviewed by phone. They receive a two-day orientation and training, then attend follow-up workshops every month. The children are referred by schools and parents, and attend three days a week for three hours. Children have 30 minutes for snack and community time, and then spend 120 minutes for skills development in math and language arts, which includes 30 minutes for homework. The final 30 minutes focus on cultural activities. The project requires parents/guardians to be involved. Part of the contract is that parents will attend school conferences, and tutors have attended with family members that ask for the support.

Community Day School
5234 South Mayflower
Seattle, WA 98118
(206) 723-7993
Contacts: Caryn Swan and Julie DeChurch

Community Day School runs five before and after school and summer programs in Seattle public elementary schools. All five sites offer homework assistance. The children arrive, have a snack, and then have a 45-minute homework period. Special activities or clubs begin when the homework time is over. The programs maintain a ratio of 1:10 for homework time through use of teachers and volunteers (including older children working with younger children). The programs work hard to maintain a strong connection with the schools. The coordinators meet regularly with the principals. In addition, each classroom teacher is given a list of who comes to the program and then asked to set goals toward an emergent curriculum. This could include academic as well as behavioral goals.

In addition, two of the sites have a tutoring program. Each site works with 20 children who are referred by the school as being at academic risk. The first 20-30 minutes is spent getting snack and playing outdoors. Then they complete homework and go on to skill development in small groups, where they may play a math game, work on a geography activity, etc. The programs are staffed by a coordinator, who attends paid monthly trainings, and through volunteers who are recruited from neighboring senior programs, high school students, and family members. The program is based on Seattle school district's curriculum framework so assistance and skill activities are designed to build on skills the children are working on in school.

Dial-a-Teacher and Homework Hotline
Dade County Public Schools, Room 268
1450 NE Second Street
Miami, FL 33132
(305) 995-1822
Contact: John Moffi

Many major cities have a homework hotline. These hotlines are often staffed by school personnel and are often funded by the school district. Dade County offers help four nights a week and answers over 25,000 calls in a year. They use elementary and secondary teachers in every basic skill area, and have bilingual staff as well. They are trained in providing assistance over the phone. This type of model can be an additional resource for programs that are unable to provide support across the age and skill spectrum.

Reading is Cool
School's Out Consortium/YWCA of Seattle
1118 Fifth Avenue
Seattle, WA 98101
(206) 461-3602
Contact: Brenetta Ward

In partnership with the Seattle Department of Housing and Human Services, Seattle Public Schools, and Washington Literacy, School's Out Consortium/YWCA designed and implemented the ***Reading is Cool! Project*** ©. Created especially for use in out-of-school settings, the ***Project's*** goal is to support children's developmental needs and encourage them to enjoy recreational reading.

Children and staff at participating sites devote thirty minutes of each weekday to fun literacy activities. The ***Project*** has four main components:

- Directors and staff receive training in Recreational Reading Strategies. Topics include developmental stages of reading; learning styles; read aloud techniques; sustained silent reading; creative writing; and creating a print rich environment.
- Each program is given a recreational reading kit that contains an informational notebook for providers, 40 culturally relevant paperback books, selected magazines, books on tape, writing journals, and fun, reading incentives for children.
- Participating programs receive mini-grants to support reading enrichment activities for children and families.
- Programs also receive technical assistance in several forms, including individual support and assessment of their reading environment, access to literacy-based resources, and bi-monthly newsletters.

Currently, eight Seattle programs are participating in the ***Reading is Cool! Project*** ©.

Bilingual Reader's Theatre Program
3004 South Alaska
Seattle, WA 98108
(206) 721-0243
contact: Linda Llavore
Seattle Refugee Women's Alliance

This program serves roughly 60 low-income children ages 5-14 from refugee and immigrant families. The goals for the after-school program are to:

1. strengthen children's reading and writing skills in English as well as in their home language.

2. create opportunities for children to explore their cultural identity and family history through oral histories, folk tales and drama.
3. increase children's self-esteem and cultural pride.
4. support and strengthen the family by creating joint programming for children and parents.

In addition to daily reading and homework assistance activities, the children present quarterly cultural presentations in which children are the writers, producers and actors. Presentations are made in English, and in their first language. The program is staffed by bilingual/bicultural family advocates who work with both the children and their parents. Families served by the program are Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Mien, Hmong, Chinese, Latino and East African. The staff also monitor report cards and make efforts to connect with the school staff.

Training Staff/Volunteers to Provide Homework Assistance:
A Sample Agenda Training Outline

Goal: To learn how to provide homework assistance by:

Objective #1: Identifying positive and negative helping behaviors
Objective #2: Using a developmental approach to homework
Objective #3: Learning about basic skill development and school curriculum
Objective #4: Clarifying our role and responsibilities to children, families, and schools
Objective #5: Problem-solving typical homework issues

Introductions and a review of the goals

Exercise for Objective #1.

Think of the last time you needed help learning how to do something such as filling out a grant application, programming a VCR, learning how to get on the Internet, etc. Now think about the help you received. What were positive helping behaviors? What were negative helping behaviors? First, work together to make 2 complete lists, one of positive helping behaviors, one of negative helping behaviors.

Next, have a discussion: What behaviors will be most helpful in working with children on their homework? Adapt the list you made so that you have a permanent list to refer to when providing homework assistance or supervising staff and volunteers. Here are some of the things that may be on your lists:

Positive Helping Behaviors

- patient
- respectful
- genuine
- walks you through the problem one step at a time
- finds out what you do know, then encourages you to problem-solve by asking open ended questions
- guides you to the answer

Negative Helping Behaviors

- too busy to help
- condescending
- judgmental
- sarcastic
- takes over
- goes into lecture mode
- does it for you

Exercise for Objective #2

What should staff keep in mind about developmentally appropriate homework assistance? First, define developmentally appropriate (age, gender, individual and cultural).

Then have the participants break into 3 groups. Have each group draw an outline of a different age child or youth: Group #1: ages 6-7. Group #2: ages 8-10. Group #3: ages 11-14. Ask them to describe the important characteristics of their child/youth in providing homework assistance given the child's age, gender, individual and cultural characteristics.

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), programs that consider the developmental needs of children will consider three kinds of information or knowledge, and that these three dimensions are important for developmentally appropriate practice throughout the lifespan:

- Age appropriate: "What is known about child development and learning--knowledge of age-related human characteristics that permits general predictions within an age range about what activities, materials, interactions, or experiences will be safe, healthy, interesting, achievable, and also challenging to children;"

- Individually appropriate: "What is known about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group to be able to adapt for and be responsive to inevitable individual variation;"

- Culturally appropriate: "knowledge of the social and cultural contexts in which children live to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful for the participating children and their families."

(Bredekamp & Copple, 1997, p.9)

Exercise for Objective #3

As staff and volunteers prepare to help with homework, it is important that they understand what the typical progression of skill development is and at what ages. Ask that an educator from one of the local schools provide a basic review of the stages children go through when learning:

- Reading and writing skills
- Math skills

Often it is useful to have someone from the local schools review the school's curriculum and approach to:

- Literacy (whole language, phonics, etc.)
- Math
- Social Studies
- Science

This individual could also present information about the school's homework policy. If no one is able to come to do the training, perhaps the program director could work with the school principal or curriculum coordinator to put together the necessary information. One program found a local literacy organization which provided excellent training.

Exercise for Objective #4

If you have already established policies for the flow of communication between the homework center, home and school, please review the policy. Now ask that participants answer the following questions:

Who needs to talk together in order to successfully meet the following goals? Think about the role of the homework assistant, program director, family member, teacher, school administration in this communication.

1. Understand teacher's and school's approach to homework?
2. Understand goals for individual children/youth (strengths, learning style, areas for improvement, signs of stress, etc.)
3. Give feedback to teacher or school personnel when there are problems with homework (e.g. too hard, instructions are unclear, etc.)
4. Work together to solve problems with homework?
5. Follow-up to make sure the approach is working?

Now, how does this approach vary with these situations:

1. What if the teacher or school personnel have been unresponsive?
2. What if a family is overwhelmed with survival issues?
3. What if the family is limited English proficient?
4. What if the homework assistant is a volunteer with limited time available?

Exercise for Objective #5

You have learned about positive helping behaviors, developmental needs, basic skill development, and your role relative to home and school. Now, put all this together. Work together to decide about possible approaches to these typical homework situations. You may want to break into smaller groups to work on solutions to these homework problems.

Situation #1: Maria is in fourth grade and is new to your program. When she asks for help in writing her book report, you realize that she doesn't completely understand the book that she read and is having trouble writing complete sentences. What do you do?

Situation #2: James is struggling with math fractions for the third afternoon in a row. He has told you how it was explained in class, and you have reviewed the explanation in the textbook together. But he is still having trouble deciding if 3/8 if larger than1/4. What are some approaches you can use?

Situation #3:
Tawan is in second grade and is supposed to write a simple poem. He has crumpled up his paper many times and is clearly very frustrated. When you begin talking to him, you find that he has a wonderful idea but is having trouble writing it down without mistakes.

Resource Guide for Programs

Recreational Reading

- America Reads Challenge sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. The America Reads Challenge offers research, tutoring guides, information on hiring federal work study students as tutors, and more. Visit their web site at http://www.ed.gov/inits/americareads or call 1-800-USA-Learn.

- Reading is Fundamental (RIF)
  600 Maryland Ave, SW, Suite 600
  Washington, DC 20024
  or call (202) 287-3220

Resources for Helping Children Succeed in School

- *"The Little Things Make a Big Difference."* Parent brochure by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and World Book Educational Products. This brochure gives basic information and quick tips about ways that parents can help their children finish their homework and develop good habits for learning.

- *"Helping Your Child with Homework."* 1995. U.S. Department of Education
  A useful discussion of homework and ways to help children by monitoring their work and providing guidance and encouragement. Available at http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/Homework/index.html or by calling 1-800-USA-Learn.

- *Books to Build on: A Grade-by-Grade Resource Guide for Parents and Teachers*. 1996. Edited by E.D. Hirsch, Jr. and John Holdren.
  This is a resource guide for parents and teachers which is designed to complement the series of books listed below, which includes *What Your First Grader Needs to Know.*

- *What Your First Grader Needs to Know : Fundamentals of a Good First Grade Education*. Also edited by E.D. Hirsch, Jr. and John Holdren.
  There are books written for your second through sixth graders also! This series provides basic, grade-by-grade information about what parents should expect as children go through elementary school.

Activity Guides

- Sheila Ellison & Judith Gray. 1995. *365 Afterschool Activities*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, Inc.
  "This book is for parents, teachers, youth leaders and families. But most of all, it is for kids who want fun and imaginative activities to enjoy after school and during weekends - activities which also have easy-to-find materials and clear directions." These activities will keep children ages 7-12 engaged and entertained!

- *Operation SMART (Science and Math and Relevant Technology)*. by Girls Inc. Resource Center, Indianapolis, IN.
  Curriculum designed to increase girls' involvement in math and science by enhancing their science skills and self-confidence through enjoyable, open-ended, hands-on activities. Teaches girls to ask questions, work together, make mistakes, and try again.

- Denise Champan Weston & Mark S. Weston. 1996. *Playwise: 365 Fun-Filled Activities for Building Character, Conscience, and Emotional Intelligence in Children*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
  "Playwise offers you a wealth of creative and entertaining activities to help instill basic virtues and emotional intelligence in children. Whether you're a parent, teacher, caregiver - or all three - this book has hundreds of games and projects you can do with children to lay the foundation of self-worth upon which character and integrity are built."

Resources on Child Development

- Nancy Leffert, Peter Benson, & Jolene Roehlkepartain. 1997. *Starting Out Right: Developmental Assets for Children*. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute.
  This report takes the developmental asset framework developed by the Search Institute and applies, with the help of current research on child development and input from child experts, it to children from birth to age eleven.

- Chip Wood. 1997. *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom Ages 4-14*. Greenfield, MA: Northeast Foundation for Children.
  "Written with warmth, humor and deep reverence for children, Yardsticks helps teachers and parents better understand children. Author Chip Wood draws upon his many years of experience... to offer clear and concise descriptions of the universal characteristics of children at different ages."

- Edward Zigler and Matia Finn Stevenson. 1993. *Children in a Changing World: Development and Social Issues*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company.
  A developmental psychology text that puts school-age development in context.

Multiple Intelligences

- Howard Gardner. 1993. *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*. New York: Basic Books.
  "Howard Gardner's brilliant conception of individual competence is changing the face of education today. In the ten years since the publication of his *seminal Frames of Mind*, thousands of educators, parents, and researchers have explored the practical implications of Multiple Intelligences (MI) theory - the powerful notion that there are separate human capacities, ranging from musical intelligence to the intelligence involved in understanding oneself."

- Thomas Armstrong. 1993. *7 Kinds of Smart - Identifying & Developing your Many Intelligences*. New York: Plume.
  Thomas Armstrong's book draws on the theory of multiple intelligences, presenting the ideas in easily accessible writing. He also includes exercised that you can use to develop various intelligences.

- Daniel Goleman. 1995. *Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books.
  "Drawing on groundbreaking brain and behavioral research, Goleman shows the factors at work when people of high IQ flounder and those of modest IQ do surprisingly well. These factors, which include self-awareness, self-discipline, and empathy, add up to a different way of being smart - one he terms "emotional intelligence." ... This eye-opening book offers a new vision of excellence and a vital new curriculum for life that can change the future for us and for our children."

Sample Homework Agreement

Dear Program Families,

At _____, we are starting our year by organizing our homework center. We believe that we can support your family and your child's school success by providing some time during our day for homework.

We ask that you and your child discuss whether or not s/he should work on homework during our program. We feel that we can provide the best homework assistance when staff, children, and families have a clear understanding about how this will work. In addition, we find it helpful to have some information from both parents/guardians and children about how to best support homework efforts.

My child _____ and I have decided that s/he:
(name)

Please check one box:

_____Should work on homework at the program
_____Should not work on homework at the program

If you have decided that your child will NOT work on homework at the program, please return this form now.
If you have decided that you child WILL work on homework at the program, please work together to fill out the child/youth and parent/guardian sections.

Children/Youth

1. Draw a circle around which thing you USUALLY like the best when you are doing homework:

Quiet place to work	OR	A place where I can talk and move while I work
Desk and chair	OR	Couch or bean bag chair
Doing homework first	OR	After snack and time to run or relax
Working alone	OR	Working in a small group

2. Which homework assignments are usually the easiest for you?

3. Which homework assignments are usually the hardest for you?

4. Please complete this sentence. When I get stuck on my homework, it helps when adults:

5. I agree to:

Come to the homework area when I have homework
Bring the books, notebooks, and worksheets that I need
Try my best to understand the homework assignment at school
Be quiet if asked in the homework center
Ask for help when I need it

Child/youth signature _____

Families

1. Which homework assignments are usually the easiest for your child?

2. Which homework assignments are usually the hardest for your child?

3. Please finish this sentence: When my child gets stuck on homework, I find that it helps when I:

4. Please finish this sentence: When my child gets stuck on homework, I find that it does NOT help when I:

I agree to:

Check the homework my child has completed during program time
Support my child with unfinished or difficult homework
Talk to teachers at the school about homework issues

Parent/Guardian signature: _____

Program/Staff responsibilities:

We will provide a comfortable homework area with some materials
We will guide children with their homework without taking over
We will communicate successes or concerns about homework to families

Staff signature:_____

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Making the Most of Out-of-School Time (MOST)
1995-1998 Implementation Phase

How do we make the most of out-of-school time for our nation's children? This is the question at the heart of the MOST Initiative, a $6.5 million dollar project supported by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund (DWRD), and designed in partnership with the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST)* at the Wellesley Centers for Women. MOST (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time) is aimed at systemic community-based change to improve the quality and availability of programming for children and youth in Boston, Chicago, and Seattle during non-school hours. The National Institute on Out-of-School Time, with 20 years of action research and expertise in the field of school-age care, provides coordination and technical assistance to the Initiative. MOST communities employ collaborative strategies to address the needs of children and youth, especially those from low-income families.

In 1994, DWRD launched the MOST Initiative by selecting five cities, from an applicant pool of 24, to receive one-year planning grants. During this planning year, community-based coalitions in the five cities developed Action Plans to address the following national goals:

- Program start-up and improvement
- Increase the numbers of children served
- Increase professional development and in-service training opportunities for providers
- Increase public awareness of the need for out-of-school care
- Resource development to sustain the project's goals

Action Plans were developed through an intensive collaborative process that allowed for community members to assess needs, develop strategies, and generate substantial matching funds. Three cities--Boston, Chicago, and Seattle--received grants in May 1995, of $1.2 million each for implementation of their three-year plan. Under the umbrella of one or more lead agencies, the MOST cities developed a governance structure to engage a wide range of stakeholders (e.g., school-age administrators and staff, city officials, parents, large youth-serving agencies, religious organizations, higher education institutions, public schools, etc.) to meet the goals of the Initiative. Although each plan is unique to the needs of its particular community, they all involve the following activities:

** formerly the School-Age Child Care Project*

- Participation in a national accreditation project
- Development of college course work in school-age care culminating in a degree or certificate
- Implementation of financial assistance programs for families in need of school-age care and practitioners interested in career development
- Local public awareness campaigns
- Development of local funding resources
- Technology initiatives
- Planning and implementation of an annual stakeholders' conference
- Facilities improvement efforts

MOST employs a **community-based, collaborative** approach towards improving the quality and quantity of out-of-school services for children and youth. This strategy creates the opportunity for the development of a community infrastructure to provide leadership, resources and commitment to children's out-of-school time. As the infrastructure expands and strengthens, there is potential for **systems change** to occur, whereby the community has the capacity to create partnerships and expend resources to help all children access affordable, enriching opportunities during non-school time. The multiple goals and activities of MOST are key to initiating and driving systems change that allows for long-term **sustainability**. These four concepts highlighted above—community based, collaborative, systems change, and sustainability, are the building blocks of MOST. They provide the conceptual framework and foundation for the myriad of efforts underway in all three MOST cities.

Staff at the National Institute on Out-of-School Time work closely with each community to provide technical assistance and training support. They facilitate communication and sharing of experiences between the MOST cities, and gather and disseminate information related to the Initiative at the national level. Other supports include a partnership with the Wheelock Centers for Career Development in Early Childhood Education to provide technical assistance in professional development, and a partnership with the National School-Age Care Alliance to work on the program improvement and accreditation pilot. In addition, the Chapin Hall Center for the Study of Children is conducting a multi-year evaluation of the MOST Initiative. At the conclusion of the Implementation Phase, the National Institute on Out-of-School Time will synthesize and disseminate technical assistance materials for use in other communities.

KEEP CONNECTED TO THE MOST INITIATIVE

- Visit the National Institute on Out-of-School Time on the **World Wide Web** at: **http://www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC/** [case sensitive]

- Discuss school-age issues on **SAC-L listserv.** To subscribe, send the message: **subscribe SAC-L <Your Name>** (substituting your own name, without brackets) to: **listserve@postoffice.eso.uiuc.edu.** If you have any questions about SAC-L, contact Lillian Coltin by e-mail at lcoltin@wellesley.edu or by telephone at (781) 283-2539.

We want to hear from you...

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time's (NIOST's) mission is to improve the quantity and quality of school-age child care programs nationally through collaborative work with communities, individuals, and organizations, and to raise the level of public awareness about the importance of children's out-of-school time. NIOST concentrates its efforts in four primary areas—research, education and training, consultation, and program development.

Have a MOST-like initiative in your community? Interested in starting one up? Please talk to us about it—let's share ideas and collaborate!

Joyce Shortt, Project Director
NIOST, MOST Initiative
Center for Research on Women
106 Central Street
Wellesley, MA 02481
(781) 283-2526 Fax: (781) 283-3657
e-mail: jshortt@wellesley.edu

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Introduction

Homework has become a hot topic for school-age care providers. Ten years ago, providers believed that families were responsible for helping children with homework. But the needs of children, families and communities are changing. This booklet is designed to help providers and parents think about the role of out-of-school time programs in helping children with their homework. It will provide information about the purposes and effects of homework. It will also help providers and parents think about whether their program should provide homework help. Finally, it will introduce ideas and strategies for supporting children's learning.

What is the Purpose of Homework?

- To practice lessons learned in school.
- To introduce material that will be learned the next day in school.
- To apply skills to new situations.
- To apply many skills to one project (ex: book reports, science projects).

NIOST's Position on Homework Assistance

- The best homework policy reflects the opinions and needs of children, families, program staff and schools. Staff and parents can look at the research on homework, and the resources available, when designing their policy.

- Homework help and learning activities are especially important for children who are struggling in school or whose families are not able to help with homework.

- Homework is only one way to support school success. Programs can also offer recreational reading, tutoring, and many other learning activities.

- Children's academic needs must be balanced with their needs to relax, have snacks, learn new skills, get exercise, and develop social skills.

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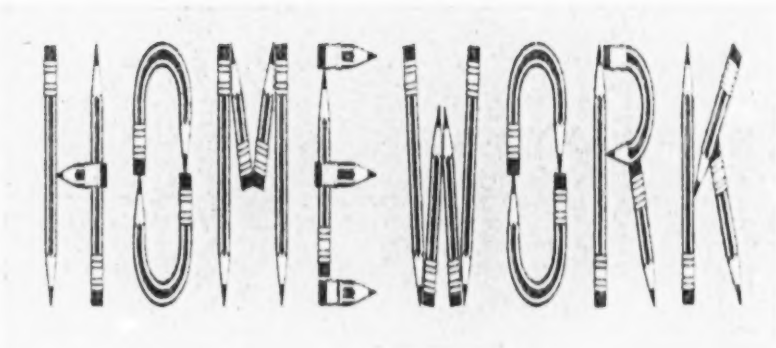
What research tells us[1]

- Homework is more effective for youth in middle school and high school. Homework has a smaller effect on school achievement for children in elementary school.

- Short, frequent assignments are most effective.

- The recommended amount of homework time per day increases as children get older:

  Grades 1-3: 10-45 minutes
  Grades 4-6: 45-90 minutes
  Grades 7-9: 60-90 minutes



[1]Cooper, Harris. 1989. *Homework*. New York: Longman.

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Possible positive effects of homework:

+ Children learn how to study. Children get in the habit of doing work on their own. They know they can learn and succeed.
+ Children practice skills they have learned in school. They also learn new skills.
+ Children see school as their responsibility. They learn to solve problems on their own. They learn to plan ahead and save time for their work.

Possible negative effects of homework:

– Children may spend too much time on homework. They may get tired. They may lose interest in school.
– Children may not have enough time to relax and make friends. Children may not have time to learn new skills like sports, art or music.
– Children who do not have the support to finish homework may fall further behind in school.

Learning what people think

When deciding if your program should provide homework help, it is important to think about the needs and opinions of everyone involved. Here are some sample questions to ask.

Children

1. When do you do your homework now?
2. Do you have the time, supplies and help that you need to do it?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing homework at the program?

Program Staff

1. Would it help children and families if homework was done at the program?
2. What are the advantages/disadvantages?
3. Would you feel comfortable helping children with their homework?
4. What kinds of training and support would help you give quality homework assistance to children?

Families

1. Would you like your child to do her/his homework at the program? How would this be helpful or not helpful for your child? For you as a family?
2. What kind of help does your child need?

School Staff

1. Do you feel that after-school staff should provide homework help?
2. What are the advantages/disadvantages?
3. Would you be willing to help program staff by giving them information about:
   - individual students: strengths, learning styles
   - what is taught in the school and how it is taught
   - school district learning goals.

Setting a Homework Policy: A Discussion Guide

1. Will we just offer the time and place to do homework or will we offer homework help?
2. Who will offer it (program staff, teachers from school, volunteers, tutors, etc.)?
3. What training and supervision will they need?
4. How much time should be set aside for homework? Should children have to complete their homework?
5. Where can we locate a homework corner?
6. What resources are needed?
7. How can good communication be maintained between families, schools, and providers if homework is to be done in the program?
8. How will you follow-up to be sure this homework policy is working?

Homework as One Activity Choice

Some programs create a homework space. Each day children decide if they want to go to the homework space or not. They also decide when to go to the homework space.

Advantages

- Gives children the chance to make thoughtful decisions about homework.
- Lets children relax or blow off steam when they need to.

Disadvantages

- Homework may not get done.
- Children who have problems with homework may not do it.

Homework Assistance

Homework as a Contracted Activity

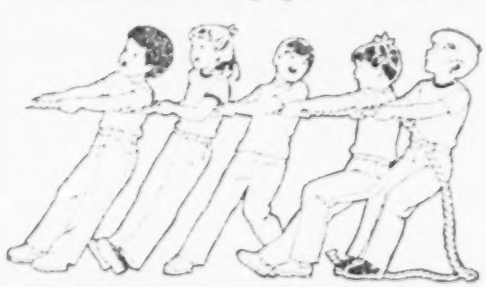
Children, families and programs enter into a contract about homework. The contract says how much homework a child will do, and when they will do it.

Advantages

- Allows children and families to work out decisions about homework together.
- Both staff and children know what the child is expected to do.

Disadvantages

- Adds a layer of paperwork.
- Parents may pressure children to sign a contract that the children do not agree with.



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Homework as Part of the Daily Schedule for Every Child

A mandatory homework time is set for every day.

Advantages

- Provides quiet time for programs with limited space.
- Offers structured homework time for children who are easily distracted.

Disadvantages

- Children have no choice. There is no flexibility to meet their different needs and moods.
- Children who don't have homework may:
  1) have nothing to do
  2) be given worksheets that are too hard or too easy.
- Young children may be expected to spend as much time on homework as older children.

Homework Help that Includes Tutoring, Mentoring or Learning Activities

Advantages

- Builds academic skills. This is especially important for children who are struggling in school.
- Provides positive role models and relationships.
- Offers one-on-one help to meet the different needs of each child.

Disadvantages

- Reduces time for children to relax or blow off steam.
- Leaves less time for children to build relationships with other children.
- Decreases time for social, creative and physical activities.

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Tips for Helping Children with Homework

It is helpful when people:

✓ are patient

✓ are respectful

✓ are genuine

✓ walk children through the problem one step at a time

✓ find out what the child already knows, then encourages problem-solving by asking open ended questions

✓ guide children to the answer.

It is not helpful when people:

✗ are too busy to help

✗ are condescending

✗ are judgmental

✗ are sarcastic

✗ take over

✗ go into lecture mode.

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Children who Struggle with Homework

If a child struggles with homework on a regular basis, the child may be having an academic problem.

- The child may be behind in school.
- The homework may be too hard.
- The child may need extra help in a subject.
- The child may have a learning disability.

When a child is having problems, it is important for program staff to talk with parents and school staff. Together they may find the best way to help the child.

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Finding a Balance: What do Children Need?

Homework is important. But children also need time to:

- relax and have a healthy snack
- develop a strong sense of self
- build relationships with children and adults
- explore their creative talents
- learn about the world around them
- practice physical skills.

Schools often focus on reading, math and language arts. It is also important for children to learn art, music, and "people skills." They need to explore their communities and cultures. There are many ways to be smart and many skills that will help children succeed in life. Out-of-school time providers can offer children age-appropriate, culturally relevant activities. These experiences let children develop new skills and strengthen ones they already have. Providers can support skills learned in school by creating fun projects or through field trips.

Examples of Fun Learning Projects

- Take a field trip to a local science or art museum.

- Ask children to interview members of their family about where they have lived and what they have done. Younger children can share the stories of their families. Older children can write down what they learned. They can collect the stories and make a book to keep at the program.

- Have children make up new words for their favorite songs.

- Once a week during winter, take the children out to look at the moon. Children can draw the different phases. They can get a book from the library and learn the names of the phases. They can make paper mache models of them. They can use glow-in-the-dark stickers to map moon phases on the wall or ceiling.

For more information:

This booklet is based on a research paper by the same authors. The paper provides in-depth information about all of the topics covered in this booklet, plus:

- program models from around the country
- a sample homework agreement
- a resource guide
- a sample agenda for training providers to help with homework.

To order the full text version of this paper, contact:
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